

SYSTEMS AND METHODS FOR DISSEMINATING INFORMATION

Background of the Invention

The present invention relates to information dissemination systems and particularly to streamlined systems and methods for disseminating information.

With the advent of the Internet, consumers and businesses have gained a new avenue for fulfilling their information needs and have also brought great changes to the way consumers and businesses interact. The Internet, however, has also brought much frustration and confusion to the very same consumers. It has solved some age old problems but has created new ones. It has created an explosion of valuable information which makes it easier for consumers to find and obtain information, but it has also created an overload of irrelevant information as well.

Today, consumers looking for information typically do not have time to explore a large Web site, to sort through tens of thousands of search results, to wait for weeks to receive a brochure in the mail, or to be put on hold for a long time to speak to a company representative. Consumers want to be able to obtain the specific information they want, when they need it, without wasting time or effort. They also want their privacy and to be able to make requests anonymously.

Moreover, they do not want to be bothered by telemarketing calls in response to simple information requests.

In response, companies are looking for ways to meet those consumer requests, which would lead to increased sales, better communications, and reduced costs. Companies are also looking for methods to track the effectiveness of their advertising and promotional dollars in a world where media is becoming more and more fractured. Companies need a method to measure both global and individual activities across practically all media, and have a need for meaningful reports that combine information from different media.

Known existing systems have been deficient in meeting these needs. For example, autoresponder systems have been developed to send information to interested parties through e-mail. These known systems have been deficient, for example, because they require users to remember many different and lengthy e-mail addresses for products or services of a number of different vendors, because they lack effective means for tracking advertisements across different media, because they require contacting several vendors to receive information on different products, etc.

25 Summary of the Invention

In accordance with the principles of the present invention, quick and efficient satisfaction of different information distribution needs for both information requestors and information disseminators may be met through a central information dissemination service. An information disseminator (e.g., a company seeking to disseminate information) may register with a

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published to such an extent as to make the fixed
portion as easy to recall as it is easy to recall
telephone information directory assistance (e.g.,
"411"). The variable portion may be published to show
5 its association with a particular promotion and its
association with an information dissemination service
that uses the fixed portion.

Information disseminators may access the
system through practically any suitable equipment that
10 has sufficient processing and communications to support
email. The central information dissemination service
may include a central facility that may have various
hardware and/or software suitable for supporting the
capabilities discussed herein. The software may have
15 been implemented on the hardware of the central
facility to implement the central information
dissemination service.

The central information dissemination service
may track and generate reports on information and
20 request dissemination activities. The central
information dissemination service may assign a global
code to each registered information address. The
central information dissemination service may have an
information disseminator database that stores
25 information on the global code and stores other
information. The information disseminator database may
include information that is associated with each
information address, which is used by the central
information dissemination service to quickly create or
30 retrieve specific messages in response to information
requests.

An individual tracking code may be generated
for each information request that is received. The

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central information dissemination service may have an
information requestor database that stores individual
tracking codes and further stores other information of
particular information requests. The information
5 disseminator database and information requestor
database may be used in tracking dissemination activity
and in generating reports. Information disseminators
may be given access to the databases through a
communications connection between the central
10 information dissemination service and the equipment of
information disseminators. The communications
connection may give information disseminators the
ability to post, delete, replace or update content.

Responses to information requests (e.g.,
15 e-mails) may be sent in a format that is determined to
be suitable for the display capabilities of each
particular information requestor. Responses may
include text, graphics, links, additional e-mails,
registered information addresses, etc. Links and/or
20 information addresses in the responses may be used to
obtain additional information from Web sites, the
central information dissemination system or to purchase
desired products or services. An information
requestor's action in response to an email may be
25 tracked by the central information dissemination
service.

The central information dissemination service
may have a screening process for registering
information addresses. Information addresses or
30 portions thereof that are requested to be registered
may be screened for particular factors, such as whether
a requested address has already been registered,
whether a requested address contains profanity, whether

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The central information dissemination service may examine incoming messages and may translate the addresses of the incoming messages to identify which account or information is associated with a particular address. If desired, the central information dissemination service may inform requestors in responding messages of a fee for information (or for products or services) and may provide the requestors with an opportunity to pay the fee.

For example, when an enabled banner is "clicked," a window for an e-mail may be displayed (e.g., displayed by an e-mail client application) that includes an addressee field that has been automatically populated with an appropriate information address. A user may simply select the send option for the e-mail to send the e-mail.

25 Messages sent in response to information requests may be created in a number of suitable ways. For example, an information disseminator may be permitted to choose or upload messages to the central information dissemination service for distribution, 30 permitted to upload a template for messages to the central information dissemination service, or may be permitted to use an administrative area of the central information dissemination service to create a template.

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in accordance with the principles of the present

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FIG. 5 is a flow chart of illustrative steps involved in tracking and ordering information in accordance with the principles of the present invention;

5 FIG. 6 is a flow chart of illustrative steps
involved in translating information addresses in
accordance with the principles of the present
invention;

FIG. 7 is a flow chart of illustrative steps
10 involved in generating messages in response to
information requests in accordance with the principles
of the present invention;

FIG. 8 is a flow chart of illustrative steps involved in generating messages that include links to
15 other documents in accordance with the principles of the present invention;

FIG. 9 is a flow chart of illustrative steps involved in tracking or reporting message activity in accordance with the principles of the present invention;

FIG. 10 is a flow chart of illustrative steps involved in providing added functionality to the information dissemination service in accordance with the principles of the present invention;

25 FIG. 11 is a diagram of an illustrative
e-mail message in accordance with the principles of the
present invention;

FIG. 12 is a diagram of an illustrative advertisement that includes registered address information in accordance with the principles of the present invention;

FIG. 13 is a diagram of an illustrative article that includes registered address information in

accordance with the principles of the present invention;

FIG. 14 is a diagram of an illustrative telephone directory page that includes registered
5 address information in accordance with the principles of the present invention;

FIG. 15 is a cross-sectional view of a magnetic data storage medium encoded with a set of machine-executable instructions for performing the
10 method according to the present invention; and

FIG. 16 is a cross-sectional view of an optically readable data storage medium encoded with a set of machine executable instructions for performing the method according to the present invention.

15 Skilled artisans will appreciate that some elements in certain FIGS. are illustrated for simplicity and clarity and have not necessarily been drawn to scale.

Detailed Description of the Invention

20 Individuals who are interested in obtaining particular information from organizations that are the source of the information may interact with a centralized service (a central information dissemination service) to quickly and efficiently meet
25 their information needs. The centralized service may include a central facility. The central facility may include hardware and software. The software may be implemented on the hardware of the central facility to implement the service. For clarity and convenience,
30 the centralized service is primarily discussed in the context of a central facility.

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If desired, a software package may be implemented to provide the service. An information dissemination software application(s) that implements the service may be provided to different companies to implement the service at different central facilities to provide separate information dissemination services. The software applications may be implemented on different hardware platforms. The service may also be implemented as an application service provider ("ASP") type service. These techniques will allow different companies to set up their own central information dissemination services. Companies that may implement the service may include information dissemination oriented companies and may include other types of businesses such as local stores, restaurants, etc. An information dissemination software application may be implemented at the central facility of one of these companies to provide an information dissemination service.

20 The service may have a general communications address (e.g., a top-level domain name) that is easily recalled from memory. Organizations who wish to distribute information may register with the service to obtain a unique account (e.g., an e-mail account) at the central facility. The account information (e.g., the information address of the account) may be published and interested individuals may quickly fulfill their information needs by sending a message (e.g., an e-mail) to a particular account at the central facility. The central facility may quickly respond to the message (e.g., send an e-mail) with appropriate information by recognizing the account to

An information address of an account at the central facility may simply be the key for accessing information associated with the account. For example with reference now to FIG. 1, at step 100, an information disseminator, such as a product vendor, may establish an information address. The information address may be a unique address that the information disseminator has obtained through registration with the central facility. The information address may include a portion (e.g., a root portion) that is the base address for communicating with the central facility.

The base portion may be a fixed portion that remain practically the same (e.g., is the same) for practically every information address (e.g., for every information address) that is registered with the central facility. Other than the fixed portion, practically every information address may include a code portion that is varied to identify different information addressed at the central facility. The code portion may also be used to associate information with an information address that has been registered to disseminate that information. For example, an information address may be an Internet e-mail address having a second-level domain name that is associated with the central facility and having a prefix (a code portion) for a particular e-mail account at the central facility. Each registered information address may be a unique information address at the central facility. At step 100, an information disseminator may submit particular information, files, templates, or other

part of an information address. If desired, the fixed portion may be publicized to make that portion of information addresses to be ubiquitous, well known, and easily recalled from memory. This provides information requestors the convenience to only remember a code portion of an information address. Code portions may be also be publicized at step 102 to inform the public of the association of the code with a particular promotion and to inform the public of the association of the code with the fixed portion or the association of the code with the information dissemination service that uses the fixed portion.

At steps 100 and 102, an information disseminator may register different information addresses for the dissemination of essentially the same information and may present each of the different information addresses through different presentation means (e.g., different media). This will permit the information disseminator to track advertisements that have the same focus (e.g., advertisements for a single product) across several different types of media (e.g., print, radio, television, etc.). Reports may be generated for tracking the different advertisements. Tracking codes may be generated and used in responses to aid in tracking advertisements. Tracking codes and reports are further discussed below.

At step 104, an information requestor (e.g., someone who has noted the information address) may communicate with the central facility using a registered information address. The information requestor may communicate (e.g., send messages such as e-mails) with the central facility using communications equipment (e.g., software and/or hardware) that is

central facility 106 may be configured to communicate with user equipment 108 and vendor equipment 110. User equipment 108 may be equipment that is used by information requestors to interact with central
5 facility 106. Vendor equipment 110 may be equipment that is used by information disseminators to interact with central facility 106.

Central facility 106 may be capable of communicating with one or more types of user equipment
10 108. User equipment 108 may be a mainframe computer, a mini-computer, a micro-computer, a personal computer, a laptop computer, a palmtop computer, a personal digital assistant, a pager, a cellular telephone, a game console, a set-top box, etc. Other communications
15 enabled devices (e.g., e-mail capable devices) may also be used. User equipment 108 may include equipment that supports telephonic communications with central facility 106, which may include conventional telephones, etc. In FIG. 2, a small number of
20 instances of user equipment 108 is illustrated to avoid over-complicating the drawings.

If desired, user equipment 108 may include equipment used by retailers in performing transactions with customers. Retailers may enter a customer's
25 e-mail address at checkout. The date, time, and bar code information for products may also be recorded. Central facility 106 may be used to send information and promotions corresponding to the bar codes to the customers (e.g., sent in a batch process)). If
30 desired, information addresses corresponding to purchased products may be printed on customer receipts.

User equipment 108 may communicate with central facility 106 through communications connection

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114 may include a direct connection with central facility 106. Communications connection 114 may be the same as communications connection 112. Vendors or information disseminators may communicate with central facility 106 though other techniques such as by corresponding using paper correspondence or electronic media.

Central facility 106 may provide a centralized streamlined information distribution service through which the public may obtain quick and reliable satisfaction of their information needs. Central facility 106 may include suitable hardware and/or software for providing some or all of the capabilities described herein. A central information dissemination service and/or central facility 106 of a central information dissemination service may be considered to be "central" in that different information requestors may request different information materials of different information disseminators using information addresses that each include a portion that is central to practically all of the information addresses by which the information dissemination process may be centralized. Illustrative hardware and/or software that is described herein to be part of central facility 106 and/or part of the information dissemination service may include some hardware and/or software that is not centrally located.

As mentioned above, an information disseminator may be an organization that is interested in disseminating information to interested parties. Information disseminators may wish to disseminate information in connection with a product or service that is offered by them. For example, a company such

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example, inbound computer communications server 118 may check the prefix portion of an incoming e-mail (i.e., the portion before the "@" symbol in an Internet e-mail address) to determine whether the prefix has been
5 registered as part of a information address at central facility 106. The system may allow information disseminators to register information addresses that include a requested prefix portion and a requested sub-domain portion (e.g., a portion after the "@" symbol
10 that is before the second-level domain name, e.g., "<companyname>.<centralfacility>.com). In such address structures, communications server 118 may check the prefix portion and the sub-level domain name to determine whether a registered information address has
15 been received. When an inbound message address does not match any one of the registered information addresses, central facility 106 may send a reply message informing the requestor that an appropriate match was not located. If desired, the reply message
20 may provide the requestor with information on how to obtain a list of registered information addresses (e.g., by providing a link to an Internet site that includes the list) or if the information disseminator has set up a default document for a root address the
25 default document may be sent.

Information address translator 119 may translate information contained in an information address. Information address translator 119 may translate an information address of an inbound message
30 to identify appropriate information in a database, including such items as media source, time and date and other items which are available for capture. Other information that is available from the inbound message

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may be captured by information address translator 119. For example, information address translator 119 may translate "carmaker@<centralfacility>.com" into the address of a database record (e.g., record #211). The
5 database address may be the address of an information record at central facility 106 for information submitted by a vendor (e.g., the car maker) for distribution when information requests to the registered information address or addresses associated
10 with that record are received. Information address translator 119 may extract or examine a portion of a received information address to perform the translation. Additional techniques and procedures for information address translator 119 are discussed below.
15 An email, to a registered information address may be considered an information request. Information that can be captured from a message sent to central facility 106 may be stored in information requestor database 122. Information requestor database 122 may
20 store certain information about substantially every information request that is received by central facility 106. A tracking code (e.g., a unique code) may be generated for each information request and information captured from each information request may
25 be stored in association with the code. The code and the associated information may be stored in information requestor database 122. For example, for a message to "carmaker@<centralfacility>.com" from "customer@<customers>.com", central facility 106 may
30 generate code AFD33MK to uniquely identify that request and may store the code and the address of the requestor ("customer@<customer>.com").

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Information requestor database 122 may include a record for each information request that includes a number of different record fields. For example, the different record fields include a field
5 for the originating address of the information request (e.g., the e-mail address of the information requestor), a field for the type of equipment used by the information requestor, a field for the code that was generated for the information request, a field for
10 the day of the week of the information request, a field for the date of the information request, a field for the time of the information request, a field for the information address (or a portion of the information address (e.g., the prefix of the information address),
15 a field for indicating whether a response sent for the information request has been opened, a field for the date and/or time that the response was opened, a field for the type of format in which the response was sent (e.g., HTML, text, etc.), a field for how many links in
20 the response were "clicked" by the information requestor, a field for the addresses of the links that were "clicked" by the information requestor, a field for instructions for how to handle responses that are returned as undeliverable, and a field for instructions
25 on how to handle further inquiries from an information requestor who has already received a response. The field for the type of equipment used by the requestor or for the identifying the capabilities of equipment used by the requestor may be determined when an
30 application of the information disseminator service is used on the requestor's user equipment. If desired, such capabilities may also be determined using an application that resides with or is part of an

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may hold information that was submitted by an
information disseminator to central facility 106 to
have the information associated with a particular
information address or associated with particular
5 information addresses when the information disseminator
registered with central facility 106.

Information disseminator database 120 may
contain a list of registered information addresses (or
relevant portions of addresses, e.g., the prefix).
10 Information disseminator database 120 may contain
information that a vendor desires to distribute in a
particular format that can be quickly replicated for a
number of different responses. For example,
information may be stored in a template format in which
15 particular fields in the format are automatically
entered by central facility 106. For example,
information disseminator database 120 may store a text
e-mail message template and a non-text e-mail message
template. If desired, central facility 106 may
20 associate more than one information record with each
information address.

Each registered information address may be
associated with a number of fields in information
disseminator database 120. Examples of general fields
25 in information disseminator database 120 may include a
filename for a text e-mail file that may initially be
sent to an information requestor, a filename for an
HTML e-mail file that may initially be sent to an
information requestor, an indicator of whether to send
30 follow up messages, and text for the entity name of the
information disseminator. There may be sub-fields
associated with the follow up message field, such as a
field identifying the number of sequential messages to

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be sent, a field specifying the sequence, a field specifying a time between each message, a field specifying filenames for the messages.

Examples of more specific fields may include

5 a field identifying the product or service involved, a field specifying the offer being made for a product or service, a field specifying whether the advertisement from which the information address was obtained was a broadcast advertisement, a field for the price, a field

10 for the creative, a field for the date of publication, the date of airing, or the date of presentation, a field for the day of week for the publication, airing, or presentation, a field for the time of day of the airing, a field for the title of the advertisement, a

15 field for the type of media used to publish, present, or air advertisement, a field for the size of the advertisement, a field for the position of the advertisement, a field for the cost of placing the advertisement, a field for identifying the circulation

20 of the advertisement, a field for identifying the cost per thousand of the advertisement, a field for an Internet Web link associated with the advertisement, a field for an e-mail message to be sent for an expired offer, a field for identifying the offer expiration

25 date, a field for identifying the quantity expiration of the offer, a field for the subject line of messages to be sent information requestors, a field for the final date on which the database record for that information address expires, a field for a message that

30 will be sent when the final expiration date has passed, a field that may used to populate the "from" addressing field of a response to an information request, a field for whether database driven e-mails are provided, a

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5 requestors, a field for the billing information when
payment information is being provided to information
requestors, a field for whether a "canned" text e-mail
message or an e-mail template is being used, a field
for a link to a template based e-mail builder, a field
10 for whether an HTML e-mail or HTML e-mail template is
being used, a field for a link to an HTML template
based e-mail builder, etc.

In some information address structures, an information disseminator may be allowed to register a sub-level domain name (e.g., <companyname>.<centralfacility>.com) as part of the prefix portion of the information address. A default information document may be stored for dissemination when an e-mail to a registered sub-level domain is received that includes text before the "@" symbol that

is not associated with particular information or valid information in information disseminator database 120. The registrant of that sub-level domain may be informed of the request activity.

5 The code and the information address (or part of the information, e.g., the prefix "carmaker") for which the code was generated may be provided to electronic message creator 126. Electronic message creator 126 may have access to information in
10 information requestor database 122 and may have access to information in information disseminator database 120. Electronic message creator 126 may use information about a particular information request and about a registered information address (e.g.,
15 information in information disseminator database 120) to create an electronic message response to the information request. Electronic message creator 126 may copy appropriate information such as the text or non-text template and insert information such as the
20 code generated for the information request and/or the information address (or a portion of the information address, e.g., the prefix) into the template. Information may be automatically inserted by marking data entry points with a symbol such as the "~" symbol.
25 Different symbols may be used. Electronic message creator 126 may determine what type of content should be used (e.g., text, HTML, "canned" text, etc.) based possibly on information that may be available to electronic message creator 126 such as information
30 contained in the address of the information requestor (e.g., based on the second level domain name of the address). Some addresses may indicate to the electronic message creator 126 that the equipment of

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activity to central facility 106. For example, a message may be sent in a way that causes a notification to be sent to electronic message push engine 134 or directly to tracking/reporting server 138 when the message is opened. Notifications may also include information on what level of non-text messages can be sent to the receiving address, and information on links in a message that were selected when the message was opened. Information that is received by electronic message push engine 134 may be provided or added to information requestor database 122 and tracking/reporting server 136.

Central facility 106 may be configured to give information disseminators access to information requestor database 122 from vendor equipment 110. An Internet browser connection or other type of communications connection may be established between vendor equipment 110 and central facility 106 to allow information disseminators to retrieve information from information requestor database 122. Also, in a similar manner, central facility 106 may be configured to have a communications connection with vendor equipment 110 for accessing or submitting information to information disseminator database 120. A central facility may assign an information disseminator rights to access information disseminator database 120 and/or information requestor database 122 when the information disseminator registers with central facility 106 or the information disseminator may be allowed to access only a specific area of information disseminator database 120 and/or information requestor database 122 depending on access levels or restrictions that have been assigned to the information disseminator.

Electronic messaging may not be the only techniques that central facility 106 may use to quickly disseminate information. If desired, fax generator 124 of central facility 106 and audio-message generator 128 may be used to distribute information in response to information requests. Telephone communications handler 116 of central facility 106 may be used to handle incoming telephone calls from information requestors. A central telephone number for central facility 106 may be called to access the distribution system (e.g., 800-555-3333). Telephone calls may be received from user equipment 108 such as cellular telephone, conventional telephones, etc. Specific telephone numbers may be assigned to specific information addresses so that a user does not have to key in an information address. The specific telephone numbers may also facilitate tracking. When a telephone call is connected, an information address (or a portion of an information address, e.g., the prefix of the address) that is registered with central facility 106 may be keyed in by the information requestor. Telephone communications handler 116 may obtain information about the requestor using techniques such as caller identification. As in the electronic messaging techniques discussed above, a tracking code may be generated for the information request and information captured from the information request may be stored in information requestor database 122. The process for telephonic information requests is essentially the same as for electronic messaging discussed above except possibly for the specific technique used for receiving and responding to address information from information requestors.

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An information requestor accessing central facility 106 via telephonic communications may be given the option of receiving a response to their information request via telecopier or via audio message playback.

5 When a telecopier response technique is used, fax generator 124 may create a fax file in a similar fashion as electronic message creator 126 creates an electronic message response. The fax file may be provided to fax communications transmitter 130 and
10 transmitted to a telephone number that the requestor specified in the telephone call to central facility 106. Audio-message generator 128 may access a pre-recorded audio file that is available through information disseminator database 120 and may play back
15 an audio from the file to the information requestor. The audio may include information similar to that which is provided in an electronic message or in a fax. If desired, central facility 106 may have sufficient equipment to generate a new audio message when an
20 information request is received. Audio-message generator 128 and fax communications transmitter 130 may provide information or responses to tracking/reporting server 136 and/or to information requestor database 122 and/or to information disseminator
25 database 120. Audio-message generator 128 may also automatically convert a text document from information disseminator database 120 into speech.

If desired, central facility 106 may be configured to check information disseminator database
30 120 to identify registered information addresses for which automatic follow up has been selected. Central facility 106 may send a response to a particular information request and may later check information

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disseminator database 120 to determine whether follow
up messages should also be sent for that particular
information request. If so, the process for sending
electronic messages or other types of messages may be
5 repeated.

The processes or methods that are
illustratively described herein are processes or
methods that can be implemented using the system,
equipment, software, or other resources that are
10 illustratively described in connection with FIG. 2.

Illustrative steps involved in registering
information disseminators and tracking information
requests are shown in FIG. 3. With reference now to
FIG. 3, at step 137, a central facility (e.g., central
15 facility 106 of FIG. 2) may handle requests (e.g.,
receive requests) to register particular information
addresses or register portions thereof. A request may
be submitted by an information requestor to have
information, such as marketing information associated
20 with a desired information address, distributed to the
requestor. At step 139, a central facility may run an
assignment module that checks the requested information
address or a relevant portion thereof (e.g., the
prefix of an e-mail address) to determine whether to
25 register the requested information address. Step 139
may involve using an information disseminator database
(e.g., information disseminator database 120 of FIG. 2)
to check if the requested information address or a
relevant portion thereof has already been registered
30 with the central facility. At step 139, the requested
information address or relevant portion thereof may be
otherwise examined to determine whether the requested
address should be rejected or approved. The central

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facility may apply a filter to the request to reject
address that contain well known brand names or
trademarks. However, the filter may allow the actual
owners of those brand names or trademarks to register
5 their brand name or trademark as their information
address or as part of their information address.
Another filter may be a filter used to prevent reserved
addresses or premium addresses (or portions thereof) to
be registered. Premium information addresses (e.g.,
10 million, "411@<centralfacility>.com", etc.) may be
addresses that the provider of the central facility may
register at a higher fee than charged for other
information addresses. For clarity and brevity, the
term information address or a portion thereof will be
15 sometimes referred to simply as an information address.

The central facility may also apply a filter
to prevent certain types of words from being
registered. Requests for information addresses that
include profanity, hateful words, or other context-
20 sensitive words (e.g., the word sex may be used in the
context of Middlesex college) may be rejected. The
central facility may generate a report perhaps on a
daily basis to inform the operator of the system of the
request activity. The operator may exercise further
25 analysis of incoming requests.

If desired, steps 137 and/or 139 may be
performed by a facility other than the central facility
(e.g., a facility separate from the central facility).
The resulting address information may be provided to
30 the central facility for use in information
dissemination.

At step 141, the central facility may receive
and store material from an information disseminator

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that is used for preparing responses to information requests directed to a particular information address. As mentioned above, the material may be text, HTML, prerecorded audio, or other material that may be used
5 to respond to information requests to a particular information address. If desired, receiving the message material may be part of the registration process so that an information address can be easily associated with the appropriate message materials. Information
10 that is added to an information disseminator database by an information disseminator, including file attachments, may be scanned for computer viruses and/or inappropriate material.

If desired, step 141 may be performed by a
15 facility other than the central facility (or separate from the central facility). If steps 137, 139, and 141 are not being performed directly by central facility, then a substantial portion of the registering information disseminators is being performed by
20 equipment and/or resources other than the central facility.

At step 142, the central facility may create a database record(s) for use with the information address. The database record may be a record in an
25 information disseminator database (e.g. information disseminator database 120 of FIG. 2). Potential information fields for such a record have been mentioned above. At step 144, a global tracking code (e.g., a unique tracking code) may be assigned by the
30 central facility to the registered information address. The tracking code may include embedded information regarding information in the database record associated with the information address. The global tracking code

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may be an information management tool that the central facility and/or information disseminator may use to quickly access and/or organize information in connection with the information address.

5 At step 145, communications may be established between the central facility and an information disseminator who registered the information address (e.g., via vendor equipment 110). At step 145, communications may be established for the information
10 disseminator to access, download, or change information in the database record associated with their information address. For example, the information disseminator may access the information disseminator database using an Internet Web page browser. If
15 desired, an information disseminator may be permitted to delete a database record that is associated with their registered information address. At step 146, an individual tracking code may be assigned to an information request that is received at a central
20 facility. An individual tracking code may be assigned to each received information request. If desired, the individual tracking code may be combined with the global tracking code to provide for efficient information management techniques.

25 Information can be communicated between central facility 106 and an information disseminator (e.g., via vendor equipment 110) through practically any suitable technique such as, manual entry into an Internet Web form, upload via File Transfer Protocol,
30 upload via Internet Web form, export of database records, direct connections between databases, XML streaming of content, etc.

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If desired, the central facility may be configured to check whether a new version of a database record exists in vendor equipment (e.g., vendor equipment 110 of FIG. 2) and may be configured to

5 replace the stored record (e.g., a record in information disseminator database 120) with the new record. The central facility may allow information disseminators to setup custom data transfer options between the central facility and the vendor equipment.

10 The custom data transfer options may apply selected filters or processes to database information before the information is made available to vendor equipment 110.

Illustrative steps involved in tracking requests and distributing information are shown in

15 FIG. 4. With reference now to FIG. 4, at step 148, an incoming information request may be received and the information address for that information request may be matched with a record in an information disseminator database to retrieve appropriate information and/or

20 materials for generating a response to the information request. At step 150, a database record may be created in an information requestor database (e.g., information requestor database 122 of FIG. 2) for the incoming information request. As mentioned above, particular

25 fields in the database record may be populated based on information that is captured from the information request. At step 152, communications may be established between the central facility and an information disseminator (e.g., via vendor

30 equipment 110) to give the information disseminator access to the information requestor database. For example, the information disseminator may access the

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information requestor database using an Internet Web page browser connection.

If desired, a series of sequential messages may be sent to information requestors at predetermined time intervals at step 154. This technique may be used to create an automatic customer relationship management system. At step 156, the central facility may generate reports detailing information on requestor and response activity. The reports may be produced using the global code or the individual tracking code so that the information may be meaningful to marketers.

Illustrative steps involved in tracking and ordering information are shown in FIG. 5. With reference now to FIG. 5, at step 158, a message sent in response to an information request may be presented to an information requestor. As part of the message, contact information or user-selectable options may be presented to the information requestor. At step 160, the information requestor may initiate a communication using the contact information or options to order the product or service that is associated with the message. Step 160 may include steps 160, 162, 164, 166, 168, 170, and 172. At step 162, a link to an Internet Web site may be presented to the information requestor. The global code may be used in the address of the link to quickly bring the information requestor to a specific page on an appropriate Internet Web site for that product or service (e.g., "www.<vendor>.com/ABQDSRT" or "www.<vendor>.com/5XA922ZX"). An individual tracking code may also be used in the Web site address. The global code may also be used in an address of a link to a central facility. The code in the link may be used

by the central facility to determine an appropriate web page address and to forward a user to that page.

Information disseminators may have associated different web pages with different global tracking codes and/or

5 with different information addresses to be used to direct information requestors to additional information on a desired subject.

At step 164, the information requestor may dial a telephone number that has been presented to the
10 requestor for placing orders or obtaining more information. For such telephone interactions, the global code and/or individual tracking code of a response to an information request may be keyed in by the information requestor to quickly direct the
15 information requestor to the appropriate extension or a unique phone number may be used that connects the information requestor directly to the requested information. At step 166, an order form that was included in the response may be completed by the user
20 and sent by e-mail communications to place the order. A global tracking code and/or an individual tracking code may have been embedded in the order form. At step 168, an information requestor may complete an order form (e.g., by printing and completing the printed
25 order form, by opening the order form in electronic form and completing it on a computer) that was included in the response to the information requestor and may fax the order form to an appropriate telephone address. The order form may include the global code and/or the
30 individual tracking code. The user may also fill the form out on the computer and fax it directly from the computer if the computer is so equipped.

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Illustrative steps involved in translating an address of an information request are shown in FIG. 6. With reference now to FIG. 6, at step 184, if desired, an information request may be automatically created by an e-mail client application and appropriate fields in an e-mail may be automatically populated when a user "clicks" on an enabled banner or link. In other situations, an information requestor may manually invoke an e-mail client application and may populate the appropriate fields. At step 181, an information request may be sent. At step 176, the address of an information request may be matched against an information disseminator database that stores a list of registered information addresses. At step 183, when a matching registered information address is not located, the address of the information request is examined to identify whether a default document has been setup by an information disseminator to handle requests sent to particular addresses. For example, an information disseminator may specify a default document for

responding to e-mails that do not have a registered information address, but have sufficient address identifying information in the address portion of the e-mail (e.g., "<unregisteredaddress>@<companyname>.centralfacility>.com") to allow the e-mail to be associated with a particular default document. The process moves from step 183 to step 177 if there is a default document that can be associated with the information request. Otherwise, at step 178, an error message is sent back to an information requestor. The error message may include information on where a list of registered information addresses may be obtained. At step 180, error details are used to produce a report for a system operator. At step 182, if the incoming message information address matches a registered information address or if there is a matching sub-level domain address that has been registered, user information available from the information request may be added to an information requestor database. Default information associated with a registered sub-level domain name may be sent to an information requestor when a received information address only includes valid/registered domain name addressing.

At step 177, the central facility may determine if information (e.g., presently valid information) is available for the information address used in the request. If desired, at step 177, an information request may be examined to determine whether security information (e.g., a security code) that is needed to access desired information was included in the information request. For example, at step 181, an information requestor may have inserted a personal identification code or other security code in

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central facility as part of the information request.
In some circumstances where there is insufficient
information to determine the capabilities of the
equipment, the central facility may adopt a default
5 setting (e.g., send non-text message).

At step 200, a non-text template may be
retrieved from an information disseminator database
(e.g., copied from a library of non-text templates in
an information disseminator database) when the
10 information requestor's equipment is determined to be
non-text capable. At step 202, a text template may be
retrieved from an information disseminator database
(e.g., copied from a library of text templates in an
information disseminator database) when the information
15 requestor's equipment is determined to be text
messaging capable. Templates that are retrieved may be
templates that correspond to the information being
requested by the information requestor.

At step 204, specific information may be
20 inserted into appropriate points in a template. For
example, the information address and an individual
tracking code may be entered in select sections of a
retrieved template.

If desired, a template may be used that
25 includes promotional devices such as coupons. Global
codes and/or individual tracking codes may be inserted
into a promotional device (e.g., a membership card).
The inserted code may further aid in tracking and
monitoring marketing activity and may also aid in fraud
30 protection.

At step 206, other types of information may
be inserted into a template based on text in the
information address of the information request. An

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appropriate database or server may be accessed to obtain appropriate information for insertion into the template. For example, the text "weather22101" in an information address of an information request may cause
5 a weather database or weather information server to be accessed to obtain weather information that is automatically inserted into the template. Step 206 may also include a technique for inserting information on particular models of appliances (or machines) and
10 distributing information on an individual appliance (or machines). For example, an information address may include the model number of a refrigerator (e.g., "AMANA45TLC@<centralfacility>.com"). A manual or other information for that model may be distributed by the
15 central facility when the central facility receives a message to that address. Further by way of example, an information address may include the specific serial number of a particular refrigerator (e.g., "AMANA4560822294@<centralfacility>.com"). Specific
20 information about that particular refrigerator may be distributed by the central facility when the central facility receives a message to that address. These messages may include both general information about the appliance maker that is inserted into a message based
25 on the name of the appliance maker being in the information address and specific information that is based on the model or serial number of the appliance.

At step 208, a message created using a template may be sent to the information requestor. At
30 step 210, data records associated with the message may be made available to a response tracker (e.g., response tracker 138 of FIG. 2) and/or a custom report generator (e.g., report generator 140 of FIG. 2).

FIG. 2

Illustrative steps involved in generating messages in response to information requests are shown in FIG. 8. With reference now to FIG. 8, at step 213, a message in response to an information request may be generated. The message may be formed using a technique that returns information to the sender of the message about message recipient activity. The sending equipment (e.g., outbound electronic message server 132

of FIG. 2) may receive information that may be used to determine the capabilities (e.g., text or non-text message capabilities) of the recipient's equipment (e.g., user equipment 108 of FIG. 2). At step 214, an information treeing technique may be implemented. Step 214 may involve inserting information addresses in the message to an information requestor. The information addresses may be presented in the message in a way that a viewer may simply "click" on an address to start the process of receiving information. At step 214, a link to a Web page such as a preference page may be included to present a Web page to an information requestor to sign up for additional information such as e-mail newsletters, alerts, promotions, coupons, recall information, etc.

At step 216, follow-up messages may be sent to some or all of the information requestors. An information disseminator may have instructed the central facility to send such follow up messages. At step 218, a file attachment that may have been specified to be sent with responses to information requests to a particular information address may be attached to the responses. Attachments may be software programs (or patches), printer (or other device) drivers, manuals, FAQs, sales information literature, operating manuals, price lists, product specifications, etc. The attachments may practically be in any suitable format such as in executable format, HTML format, PDF format, text format, word processor format, spreadsheet format, etc. Practically any type of file that can be attached may be sent with responses. This provides a convenient way for information requestors to automatically receive files without having to resort to

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Illustrative steps involved in tracking or reporting message activity are shown in FIG. 9. With reference now to FIG. 9, at step 220, information related to message-usage activity may be received at a central facility. The information may be received and sent to a response tracker (e.g., response tracker 138 of FIG. 2). The information may indicate whether a message sent in response to an information request has been opened and/or whether links in the message have been activated by the recipient. At step 222, the information related to message-usage activity may be combined with information requestor information from information requestor database. Step 222 may further involve sending the combined set of information to a custom report generator (e.g., report generator 140 of FIG. 2).

At step 224, activity reports may be produced. The reports may be produced specifically using formats that are saved in an information disseminator database. A global activity report may be compiled to report on the total activity for each registered information address. For example, a response index report may be generated that informs an information disseminator of the cost-effectiveness of advertisements and/or registering an information address for the advertisement. The index report include the ratio of the cost over the number of information requests that have been received for a particular information address. An individual activity report may be produced to report on individual request activity. For example, an individual pattern tracking

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"carmakernewcarB@<centralfacility>.com", and

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Illustrative steps involved in providing added functionality to the information dissemination

service are shown in FIG. 10. A central facility may send a follow up message informing a user of the availability of additional functionality that may be provided by the service. With reference now to

5 FIG. 10, the central facility may determine whether a follow up message regarding additional available functionality has already been sent to a particular address from which an information request was previously received. If the central facility

10 determines that such a message has already been sent, then the process ends. Otherwise, the process may proceed to steps 232, 233, 234, 236, 238, 242, and 244. At step 232, an option to download a program that places an icon on an information requestor's equipment

15 may be provided. The icon may be displayed and may be selectable to have the downloaded program automatically populate portions of an information request such as parts of the information address. This feature may make the information request process quicker.

20 At step 233, an information requestor may be given the option to register with the central facility (e.g., register through illustrative techniques shown herein for information disseminators) to store personal information for later access. The information may

25 store personal private information such as credit card or bank account information. The information requestor may be required to use a security code when sending an information request for the information. The security code may be inserted in the subject field of an

30 information request.

At step 234, an option to set up a referral system may be provided. When selected, the option may cause responses to current and/or future information

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requests to be sent to other people that have been specified by the requestor. At step 236, an option to create a folder on an information requestor's equipment may be provided. When this option is selected,

5 messages from the central facility may be stored (e.g., automatically stored) in one convenient location in the user equipment of an information requestor and/or stored in a third party storage location indicated by the information requestor. At step 238, an option to

10 give an information requestor access to information at the central facility may be provided. When this option is selected, an information requestor may be permitted to log into an Internet Web site of the central facility and may be authorized to retrieve any past

15 messages that were sent by the central facility. If desired, at step 242, the option may be provided by assigning a particular information address to an information requestor that the requestor may use to receive an e-mail giving access to past e-mails. If

20 desired, security protection may be used (e.g., a security code in the subject field may be used) to protect the information from being accessed by unauthorized individuals. At step 242, an information requestor who has selected one or more of these options

25 (e.g., from a follow up e-mail) and who has registered with the central facility may be given a password or security code (e.g., a personal identification code) to gain access to desired ones of these options or to gain access to information having security protection. If

30 desired, the password or code may be set by the requestor.

At step 240, an option may be provided to information disseminators to gain access to the

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5 those messages or addresses for their own purposes.

10 disseminators to have unsolicited messages or mass
message distributions be sent by the central facility
based on addresses of information requestors that the
central facility has stored in an information requestor
database. The messages may be sent to some or all of
15 the addresses. An information disseminator may be
permitted to upload messages to the central facility
for use in such unsolicited or mass message
distributions. The options described in connection
with step 240 may therefore allow an automated "do it
20 yourself" promotional message push system. Step 240
may be implemented irrespective of step 230.

25 If desired, only some of steps 232, 234, 236, 238, 240
may be performed. The order of steps 232, 234, 236,
and 240 shown in FIG. 10 is presented for illustrative
purposes.

A response to an e-mail information request
30 may be sent as an e-mail message to the e-mail address
identified in the "from" field of the e-mail
information request. The "to" field of the e-mail
information request may contain an information address

that has been registered with the central facility. An e-mail message sent in response to an information request may include various information and features. For example, with reference now to FIG. 11,

5 illustrative e-mail message 246 may be representative of an e-mail message that was sent in response to an information request. E-mail message 246 may have been created using a template or may have been created using information that was simply copied into the message.

10 E-mail message 246 may include a number of different information fields. Each field may provide relevant information related to a product or service for which e-mail message 246 was sent to satisfy an information request. E-mail message 246 may include
15 e-mail message header section 248 that may include an appropriate "subject" field. E-mail message 246 may include fields such as name of product or service 250, description 252, price 254, contact information 256, and ordering information 258. Information fields such
20 as a field for contact information 256 or a field for ordering information 258 may include a selectable link such as selectable link 260. Selectable link 260 may be an Internet Web page hyperlink or other link that may be presented to the viewer. For example,
25 selectable link 260 may be a hyperlink to a Web page of a third party that arranges for payments for products or services.

Template data insertion field 262 may have been included in e-mail message 246 when a template was
30 used to create e-mail message 246. Data insertion field 262 may be used to automatically insert global or individual tracking codes into e-mail message 246. E-mail message 246 may include graphics portion 264.

5 availability, sizes, colors, intended uses, diagrams,
photographs, shipping information, company information
help/support information, physical address location,
mailing address, Web address, outlet locations,
directions/maps, hours of operation, telephone numbers,
0 personal contact information, terms/conditions/legal
descriptions, information how to be cleared from the
system, a promotional field (e.g., coupons, reviews,
testimonials, list of other available information
documents, etc.

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Company Name

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Company Name

Company Name

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Company Name

1990 1991 1992 1993 1994 1995 1996 1997 1998 1999 2000 2001 2002 2003 2004 2005 2006 2007 2008 2009 2010 2011 2012 2013 2014 2015 2016 2017 2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023 2024 2025 2026 2027 2028 2029 2030 2031 2032 2033 2034 2035 2036 2037 2038 2039 2040 2041 2042 2043 2044 2045 2046 2047 2048 2049 2050 2051 2052 2053 2054 2055 2056 2057 2058 2059 2060 2061 2062 2063 2064 2065 2066 2067 2068 2069 2070 2071 2072 2073 2074 2075 2076 2077 2078 2079 2080 2081 2082 2083 2084 2085 2086 2087 2088 2089 2090 2091 2092 2093 2094 2095 2096 2097 2098 2099 2100 2101 2102 2103 2104 2105 2106 2107 2108 2109 2110 2111 2112 2113 2114 2115 2116 2117 2118 2119 2120 2121 2122 2123 2124 2125 2126 2127 2128 2129 2130 2131 2132 2133 2134 2135 2136 2137 2138 2139 2140 2141 2142 2143 2144 2145 2146 2147 2148 2149 2150 2151 2152 2153 2154 2155 2156 2157 2158 2159 2160 2161 2162 2163 2164 2165 2166 2167 2168 2169 2170 2171 2172 2173 2174 2175 2176 2177 2178 2179 2180 2181 2182 2183 2184 2185 2186 2187 2188 2189 2190 2191 2192 2193 2194 2195 2196 2197 2198 2199 2200 2201 2202 2203 2204 2205 2206 2207 2208 2209 2210 2211 2212 2213 2214 2215 2216 2217 2218 2219 2220 2221 2222 2223 2224 2225 2226 2227 2228 2229 2230 2231 2232 2233 2234 2235 2236 2237 2238 2239 2240 2241 2242 2243 2244 2245 2246 2247 2248 2249 2250 2251 2252 2253 2254 2255 2256 2257 2258 2259 2260 2261 2262 2263 2264 2265 2266 2267 2268 2269 2270 2271 2272 2273 2274 2275 2276 2277 2278 2279 2280 2281 2282 2283 2284 2285 2286 2287 2288 2289 2290 2291 2292 2293 2294 2295 2296 2297 2298 2299 2300 2301 2302 2303 2304 2305 2306 2307 2308 2309 2310 2311 2312 2313 2314 2315 2316 2317 2318 2319 2320 2321 2322 2323 2324 2325 2326 2327 2328 2329 2330 2331 2332 2333 2334 2335 2336 2337 2338 2339 2340 2341 2342 2343 2344 2345 2346 2347 2348 2349 2350 2351 2352 2353 2354 2355 2356 2357 2358 2359 2360 2361 2362 2363 2364 2365 2366 2367 2368 2369 2370 2371 2372 2373 2374 2375 2376 2377 2378 2379 2380 2381 2382 2383 2384 2385 2386 2387 2388 2389 2390 2391 2392 2393 2394 2395 2396 2397 2398 2399 2400 2401 2402 2403 2404 2405 2406 2407 2408 2409 2410 2411 2412 2413 2414 2415 2416 2417 2418 2419 2420 2421 2422 2423 2424 2425 2426 2427 2428 2429 2430 2431 2432 2433 2434 2435 2436 2437 2438 2439 2440 2441 2442 2443 2444 2445 2446 2447 2448 2449 2450 2451 2452 2453 2454 2455 2456 2457 2458 2459 2460 2461 2462 2463 2464 2465 2466 2467 2468 2469 2470 2471 2472 2473 2474 2475 2476 2477 2478 2479 2480 2481 2482 2483 2484 2485 2486 2487 2488 2489 2490 2491 2492 2493 2494 2495 2496 2497 2498 2499 2500 2501 2502 2503 2504 2505 2506 2507 2508 2509 2510 2511 2512 2513 2514 2515 2516 2517 2518 2519 2520 2521 2522 2523 2524 2525 2526 2527 2528 2529 2530 2531 2532 2533 2534 2535 2536 2537 2538 2539 2540 2541 2542 2543 2544 2545 2546 2547 2548 2549 2550 2551 2552 2553 2554 2555 2556 2557 2558 2559 2560 2561 2562 2563 2564 2565 2566 2567 2568 2569 2570 2571 2572 2573 2574 2575 2576 2577 2578 2579 2580 2581 2582 2583 2584 2585 2586 2587 2588 2589 2590 2591 2592 2593 2594 2595 2596 2597 2598 2599 2600 2601 2602 2603 2604 2605 2606 2607 2608 2609 2610 2611 2612 2613 2614 2615 2616 2617 2618 2619 2620 2621 2622 2623 2624 2625 2626 2627 2628 2629 2630 2631 2632 2633 2634 2635 2636 2637 2638 2639 2640 2641 2642 2643 2644 2645 2646 2647 2648 2649 2650 2651 2652 2653 2654 2655 2656 2657 2658 2659 2660 2661 2662 2663 2664 2665 2666 2667 2668 2669 2670 2671 2672 2673 2674 2675 2676 2677 2678 2679 2680 2681 2682 2683 2684 2685 2686 2687 2688 2689 2690 2691 2692 2693 2694 2695 2696 2697 2698 2699 2700 2701 2702 2703 2704 2705 2706 2707 2708 2709 2710 2711 2712 2713 2714 2715 2716 2717 2718 2719 2720 2721 2722 2723 2724 2725 2726 2727 2728 2729 2730 2731 2732 2733 2734 2735 2736 2737 2738 2739 2740 2741 2742 2743 2744 2745 2746 2747 2748 2749 2750 2751 2752 2753 2754 2755 2756 2757 2758 2759 2760 2761 2762 2763 2764 2765 2766 2767 2768 2769 2770 2771 2772 2773 2774 2775 2776 2777 2778 2779 2780 2781 2782 2783 2784 2785 2786 2787 2788 2789 2790 2791 2792 2793 2794 2795 2796 2797 2798 2799 2800 2801 2802 2803 2804 2805 2806 2807 2808

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- nylon/spandex blend for curves and comfort
- shirring details at chest
- flattering color-blocked style

- updated smaller straps
- hand wash
- made in the U.S.A.
- sizes: 6-8-10-12-14-16-18-20
- 5 -- colors: blue, berry

Priced right for summer: \$34.99

Link for photo:

<http://www.<companyname>.com/eb/product/100/EB10298-AFRETRD>

10 COMPLETE THIS TROPICAL LOOK WITH THESE ACCESSORIES

PRINTED PAREO WRAP

- 100% cotton
- waist-to-ankle coverage
- 15 -- hand wash
- made in the U.S.A.
- sizes: one fits all
- colors: black, blue, olive, pink

- 20 Perfect addition to the native swim suit: \$23.99

Link for photo:

<http://www.<companyname>.com/eb/product/101/EB10928-AFRETRD>

STRAW TOTE

- woven straw-lined with cotton twill
- 25 -- leather handles
- wood toggle closure on top
- inside zip pocket
- spot clean
- imported
- 30 -- colors: natural
- sizes: one size

Adds to a great look: \$32.00

Link for photo:

- 35 <http://www.<companyname>.com/eb/product/102/EB10928-AFRETRD>

T062T*E90B660

BEACH SLIDES

- made of durable EVA rubber
- lightweight and flexible
- flattering style with shorts and bathing suits
- 5 -- wipe clean
- imported
- sizes: 6M-7M-8M-9M-10M-11M-12M
- colors: black, purple, white, pink, turquoise, yellow

10 Completes the look! \$10.00

Link for photo:

<http://www.<companyname>.com/eb/product/103/EB10928-AFRETRD>

SPECIAL ENSEMBLE PRICE (4 items): \$ 89.00 (you save \$12)

6 EASY, FAST WAYS TO ORDER

15 -----

- PHONE: 800-555-7935 - Express Order Code EB10928-AFRETRD
- EMAIL: Highlight the order form below, hit REPLY,
fill in your order, click SEND
- 20 -- WEB: click a product link and order on the web
- FAX: print the order form, fill in and fax to
800-XXX-XXXX
- MAIL: print the order form, fill in and mail to:
Company Name, xxxxxxxxxxxx, xxxxxxxxxxxxxx, xx, xxxxx
- 25 -- STORE: send an email to EB10928S@<centralfacility>.com
and in the subject line, type your zip code -- so we
can tell you the store that is closest to where you
live

30 SPECIAL SERVICES & PROGRAMS

People just love our time-saving and thoughtful services...and they're all free! To get more information fast on our reminder service, sale notification alerts, new product announcements and much more, send a blank email to: services@eb.more.info OR

35 click this link:

QUICK 'N EASY ORDER FORM

Name: _____

City: _____ State: _____

10 Email: _____

SHIP TO (if different):

Name: _____

Address: _____

15 City: _____ State: _____

Zip: _____ Country: _____

QUANTITY	ITEM #	DESCRIPTION	SIZE	COLOR	PRICE EACH	TOTAL

20	[]	XXXXXXXX Native 1pc Swimsuit	[]		34.99	\$

	[]	XXXXXXXX Pareo Wrap	N/A		23.99	\$

	[]	XXXXXXXX Straw Tote	N/A	Natural	32.00	\$
25	*****					
	[]	XXXXXXXX Beach Slides	[]		10.00	\$

5 TOTAL \$

Sign up for these free services!

- SC: EB10928-AFRETRD

- The central facility may be configured to provide information disseminators with an

- 25 administrative area that can be used to access their
equipment (e.g. vendor equipment 110). The
administrative area may make options available to
information disseminator that can be used to build a
message template. If desired, information disseminator
30 may be given the option to upload their desired
distribution messages or message templates to the
central facility. The administrative area may also
give information disseminators the option to generate

information associated with a registered information address by copying information that is already associated with other registered information addresses.

Information addresses described above that
5 are used for receiving responses to information requests may be presented to particular individuals or to the general public in a number of different ways. For example, with reference now to FIG. 12, advertisement 266 for a new car may include promotional
10 information such as text 268 and photograph 270. Advertisement 266 may also include section 272 that informs the user of a streamlined automated service for receiving information. As shown in FIG. 12, section 272 may inform the viewer that to find the nearest car
15 dealership, the viewer may send an e-mail message to "XXXXXX@<centralfacility>.com" and may use their postal zip code in place of the "XXXXXX" in the address. In response, the viewer will receive an e-mail message providing a list of dealership in that viewer's local
20 area.

A registered information address may be published through media other than advertisements. For example, with reference now to FIG. 13, article 274 may include text 276 related to a particular subject.
25 Article 274 may also include information address portion 278 that is presented to viewers to inform viewers of a service for obtaining information related to that article. Portion 278 may be presented as a part of the text of article 274 or may be presented
30 separately set aside from the text.

Another technique may involve including information about a registered address at a central facility in a directory such as a telephone directory.

TOGETHER ESSES

With reference now to FIG. 14, telephone directory page 280 may be a page in a telephone directory that includes information 286 for identifying what group of information is listed on page 280. Page 280 may display listing 282 about a registered information address in connection with a particular telephone listing on that page (e.g., Riding Instructions - IFACTZ #123). Page 280 may also include information 284 on how to use the registered information address. Viewers may insert the address into the body of an e-mail and send the e-mail to a universal address for all information requests. This may be one technique that may be used that is in addition to the above discussed techniques.

FIG. 15 presents a cross-section of a magnetic data storage medium 400 which can be encoded with a machine executable program that can be carried out by equipment such as central facility 106, user equipment 108, and/or vendor equipment 110 of FIG. 2 to implement methods discussed in connection with FIGS. 1-14. Medium 400 may be a storage device of central facility 106, user equipment 108, and/or vendor equipment 110 of FIG. 2. Medium 400 can be floppy diskette or hard disk, having a suitable substrate 401, which may be conventional, and a suitable coating 402, which may be conventional, on one or both sides, containing magnetic domains (not visible) whose polarity or orientation can be altered magnetically. Medium 400 may also have an opening (not shown) for receiving the spindle of a disk drive or other data storage device.

The magnetic domains of coating 402 of medium 400 are polarized or oriented so as to encode,

FIG. 15

in manner which may be conventional, a machine-executable program such as those described above in connection with FIGS. 1-14, for execution by equipment such as central facility 106, user equipment 108, and/or vendor equipment 110 of FIG. 1.

FIG. 16 shows a cross-section of an optically-readable data storage medium 500 which also can be encoded with such a machine-executable program, which can be carried out by equipment such as central facility 106, user equipment 108, and/or vendor equipment 110 of FIG. 2. Medium 500 can be a conventional compact disk read only memory (CD-ROM), a digital versatile disk (DVD), or a rewritable medium such as a CD-R or CD-RW disk or a magneto-optical disk which is optically readable and magneto-optically writeable. Medium 500 preferably has a suitable substrate 501, which may be conventional, and a suitable coating 502, which may be conventional, usually on one side of substrate 501.

In the case of a CD-ROM, as is well known, coating 502 is reflective and is impressed with a plurality of pits 503 to encode the machine-executable program. The arrangement of pits is read by reflecting laser light off the surface of coating 502. A protective coating 504, which preferably is substantially transparent, is provided on top of coating 502.

In the case of magneto-optical disk, as is well known, coating 502 has no pits 503, but has a plurality of magnetic domains whose polarity or orientation can be changed magnetically when heated above a certain temperature, as by a laser (not shown). The orientation of the domains can be read by measuring

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the polarization of laser light reflected from coating 502. The arrangement of the domains encodes the program as described above.

Thus, a streamlined, centralized, and
5 efficient information distribution service may be
provided to suitably meet the needs of both information
disseminators and information requestors.

The foregoing is merely illustrative of the principles of this invention and various modifications
10 can be made by those skilled in the art without departing from the scope and spirit of the invention.